



California Regional Water Quality Control Board

Central Valley Region

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A message from Bob Schneider, Chair, and Al Brizard of the CVRWQCB to Ag Coalition Leaders

30 August 2005

Dear Coalition Leaders,

Last Friday (26 August 2005) staff of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board sent certified letters to Ag Water Quality Coalitions requiring Coalition membership information.

Coalition Leaders became aware of the letters during the Irrigated Lands Public Advisory Committee meeting in Modesto and the discussion that followed was distressing for all concerned.

While there are real matters of substance that must be addressed, we want to extend our personal apology to the Coalition leadership for the poor timing, lack of a "heads up" and disrespect for the difficult situation in which you have operated to implement the Irrigated Lands Program. Al and I are sorry that this unfolded as it did.

Following the meeting, as an individual Board member, Bob asked the Executive Officer to consider rescinding the letters.

The following are Al Brizard and my thoughts on the communication process, issues involved, and where we go from here.

A Communication Process

We, the Regional Board and Coalitions, have wrestled with difficult issues and have crafted several processes for discussion and ways to work toward resolution. While not perfect, we believed that these processes are improving. Al Brizard and I have formed an Ag Issues Subcommittee to discuss issues and communications with coalitions and the larger agricultural community. The subcommittee also works to integrate other agencies involved in water quality including the Department of Pesticide Regulation, the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the State Water Board.

The Irrigated Lands Public Advisory Committee meetings were begun to provide a forum for discussion of issues aiding or impeding the development of the Ag Waiver program and to jointly work toward resolution of those issues. Karl Longley has chaired the Technical Issues Committee, which has tackled many difficult issues and has developed the ability to conduct peer review.

Irrespective of these forums, Regional Board members have sought to foster a level of mutual respect and understanding among the participants in this program.

In a perfect world what might have happened is that the issue would be identified, discussed with appropriate individuals or leaders and brought to an open PAC meeting. Ideas and possible solutions could be discussed and an implementation plan enacted.

All of these efforts failed in this case.

California Environmental Protection Agency



The Issue:

The central issue of knowing who is and is not in a coalition is real. A solution must be found. Guessing who might not belong to a Coalition, writing to all dischargers based upon the records of the Agricultural Commissioners or other methods is, frankly, a bit inane, disingenuous and wasteful of resources.

To do our job we must know who is not in a coalition. This is clearly the frustration that our staff has felt and we very much support them in that. They have wrestled with finding a solution and Monday's letter is a product of that.

We are all working toward the same goal: protection of California's precious water supplies and protecting water quality.

We will implement a solution. If you have ideas for a workable way to identifying dischargers who do not belong to a Coalition, we would appreciate hearing it.

Where do we go from here?

There was harm done by the letters. Coalition leaders felt particularly vulnerable, trusts were stretched, and conspiracy theories advanced. Board members were also distressed; and we are not closer to a solution.

We each have options on how to proceed. Al and I like to think, and hope, that from struggle, better relationships and processes can form.

Personally, we suggest a short timeout; a clear identification of the problem and goal; and a meeting with coalition leaders to discuss potential solutions.

Not only have I asked the Regional Board Executive Officer to consider rescinding the letters, I have also requested that he meet with staff and coalition group representatives to resolve the concerns. The meeting should occur as soon as possible, preferably the week following the Regional Board's September meeting. Rather than compound this problem, I ask you to work with me to strengthen our resolve to protect California's Central Valley water quality.

We thank you for the dignity in which you expressed your feelings at Monday's meeting. Again, we apologize and look forward to working our way through this difficult time.

Cheers,

/Original signed by

Bob Schneider and Al Brizard